



# “A CRITICAL STUDY OF EXAMINING SUKUMAR’ S DISTINCTIVE WRITING STYLE, AUTEUR FILMMAKING AND THE EVOLVING PERSONA OF ALLU ARJUN IN THEIR CINEMATIC COLLABORATIONS”

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the films of Indian filmmaker Sukumar, a distinctive director, writer, and producer. His recent blockbuster film, “Pushpa 2 – The Rule,” has gained tremendous popularity in the Indian cinema industry. The current study intends to explore and analyze Sukumar’s filmmaking pattern, the recurring themes and similarities in his films, and specifically, him as a writer. An interesting aspect of Sukumar’s films is that most of his protagonists have some kind of mental or physical impairment. As in “Pushpa” has a dislocated shoulder, Chitti Babu in “Rangasthalam” has hearing loss, and Gautham in “1: Nenokkadine” has schizophrenia. His movies are character-driven and explore a range of human feelings in a very natural way. Most importantly, this research delves into the collaborative efforts of Allu Arjun and Sukumar and the evolving persona of Allu Arjun. Sukumar’s first film, “Arya” (2004), was a huge hit for Allu Arjun, followed by “Arya 2” (2009). Nearly ten years later, the two worked together again on the film “Pushpa – The Rise” (2021) and its follow-up, “Pushpa – The Rule” (2024). Finally, the study looks at how Sukumar exemplifies the traits of a true auteur in his writing. The qualitative methodology will be used with content analysis.

**KEYWORDS:** Sukumar, Arya, Arya 2, Pushpa – The Rise, Pushpa – The Rule, The Auteur Theory

## INTRODUCTION

### About Sukumar as a Writer and Director

Sukumar’s directorial debut, *Arya*, was a game-changer in Telugu cinema, noted for its unconventional structure and vibrant style. It won him the Nandi Award for Best Screenplay and Filmfare Award for Best Telugu Director, while also establishing Allu Arjun as a major star. *Jagadam* (2007) tackled youth violence with realism, gaining cult status despite modest box office returns. *1: Nenokkadine* (2014) was a psychological thriller with nonlinear storytelling, exploring trauma and identity. Though polarizing, it was praised for technical excellence.

*Rangasthalam* (2018), set in 1980s rural Andhra, was a critical and commercial blockbuster lauded for its authenticity and performances. *Pushpa: The Rise* (2021) became India’s highest-grossing film of the year, marking Sukumar’s successful foray into pan-Indian cinema. Its sequel, *Pushpa 2: The Rule* (2024), continued that legacy. He has received numerous honours, including Filmfare Award and Nandi Award for *Arya*, K. V. Reddy Memorial Award (2014), and Multiple accolades for *Rangasthalam* and *Pushpa: The Rise and the Rule*.

Sukumar is known for Multi-layered narratives and psychological depth, blending commercial appeal with intellectual storytelling, leading characters with grey shades, and challenging conventional heroism. Technical finesse and strong music-visual integration, especially with Devi Sri Prasad. Over two decades, Sukumar has significantly

influenced Telugu cinema’s artistic evolution. His journey from lecturer to filmmaker reflects a rare blend of intellect and creativity. By mentoring new talent and pushing narrative boundaries, Sukumar continues to shape contemporary Indian cinema, offering films that entertain and intellectually engage. (Wikipedia contributors, 2025)

### Films of Sukumar:

#### Pushpa 2: The Rule (2024)

*Pushpa 2: The Rule* continues Pushpa Raj’s journey as he consolidates power in the red sandalwood trade while facing rivalries and political upheaval. The film begins at Yokohama port, Japan, where Pushpa is found in a container, demanding payment for a consignment, leading to a flashback of prior events. Aspiring for legitimacy, Pushpa seeks a photo with Andhra Pradesh CM Nara Chandrababu Naidu, who refuses. Offended, Pushpa aims to overthrow the government and install ally Siddappa as CM by raising Rs. 500 crores through smuggling and dealing directly with international buyer Hameed in the Maldives. This strengthens his syndicate leadership but provokes enemies—Mangalam Srinu, Dakshayani, and Shekhawat. Shekhawat murders a syndicate member, pushing Pushpa to publicly apologize, only to later insult Shekhawat, reigniting conflict. Pushpa’s Japanese buyer link is cut, forcing him to travel in a container to Japan. There, he survives a shootout, confronts the yakuza, and forges a direct trade relationship, bypassing middlemen.

**The Gangamma Jathara Episode**, a visually spectacular

segment, depicts Pushpa in a trance-like avatar during a local festival. Dressed in a saree, dancing on coals, and performing rituals, Pushpa expresses spiritual transformation and emotional vulnerability through the song “Gango Renuka Thalli.” With a massive budget and elaborate visuals, the episode ends with a symbolic fight, reinforcing his dominance and community acceptance.

Pushpa funds Siddappa’s political rise, but personal tragedy strikes when niece Kaveri is assaulted by Bugga Reddy, leading Pushpa to kill Bugga and his family despite political backlash. This unites his enemies, including Minister Veera Pratap Reddy and others, against him. Meanwhile, Shekhawat dies in a mysterious blaze. During Kaveri’s wedding, Pushpa reconciles with his brother Mohan. However, the event is bombed by an unknown assailant, ending on a suspenseful note.

### Pushpa: The Rise (2021)

*Pushpa: The Rise* traces Pushpa Raj’s evolution from a marginalized coolie to a dominant force in the red sandalwood smuggling world. Humiliated by his background, he seeks recognition and respect. He also develops a relationship with Srivalli (Rashmika Mandanna), but faces opposition from his half-brother Mohan and rivals like Jaali Reddy. After Pushpa injures Jaali Reddy, tensions rise. Though Konda Reddy initially sides with Pushpa, a betrayal leads to his death. MP Siddhappa Naidu then appoints Pushpa as syndicate leader, sidelining Mangalam Srinu. Srinu’s wife, Dakshayani, vows revenge. SP Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat (Fahadh Faasil), a new, arrogant officer, mocks Pushpa’s illegitimacy and demands submission. In a reversal, Pushpa later humiliates Shekhawat during a private meeting, asserting his dignity and self-worth. This symbolic victory sets up their future clash. *Pushpa: The Rise* ends with Pushpa at the peak of power, yet surrounded by vengeful enemies.

### Arya 2 – (2009)

Sukumar’s *Arya 2* is a psychological romantic drama exploring the obsessive friendship and emotional rivalry between Arya (Allu Arjun) and Ajay (Navdeep), both of whom fall for Geetha (Kajal Aggarwal). While not a direct sequel to *Arya* (2004), it retains thematic continuities, blending dark humour, complex emotions, and an unconventional love triangle.

The story begins in an orphanage where Arya and Ajay become close under uneasy terms. Arya is clingy and obsessive, while Ajay longs to escape him. After a coin toss, Arya lets Ajay get adopted, believing they both win. Years later, Ajay is a successful IT businessman when Arya re-enters his life, manipulates his way into Ajay’s company, and causes disruptions masked by intense loyalty. Geetha’s arrival complicates things. Arya aggressively pursues her, while Ajay stays reserved. Arya’s erratic behaviour kissing, stalking, and mind games makes Geetha uncomfortable. She demands he confess everything to the staff, but later proposes to Ajay to escape. Ajay, knowing her feelings for Arya, frames Arya in a staged accident to win her trust. Arya, hurt but loyal, quietly leaves. When Geetha’s father arranges her marriage, Arya intervenes using wit and manipulation, eventually being forced

to marry her. He plans to reunite her with Ajay, but asks for one final day with them. During this time, Geetha realizes Arya’s deep emotional sincerity. When she tries to escape with Ajay, her father intervenes violently. Arya defends Ajay, is seriously wounded, and survives a near-death moment. *Arya 2* stands out for its psychological complexity, subversion of romance tropes, and Allu Arjun’s layered performance. Sukumar crafts a unique narrative around friendship, love, and sacrifice, making it a landmark film in Telugu cinema’s romantic genre.

### Arya – (2004)

Known for its fresh take on love and youth, the film became a trendsetter in Telugu cinema. Arya is a cheerful, free-spirited college student who falls for Geetha, a reserved girl already in a reluctant relationship with Ajay, the arrogant son of a politician. Arya’s arrival upends this dynamic by publicly declaring his love for Geetha, whom Ajay pressured into dating him by threatening suicide. Ajay asks Arya for assistance in eloping with Geetha when his father arranges his marriage to another girl. Despite his love for her, Arya helps them escape, valuing Geetha’s happiness above his desires. During their journey, Arya protects them from attackers while Ajay panics. As they take refuge in Arya’s hometown, Geetha begins to appreciate Arya’s selfless nature. Ajay and his father eventually agree to the marriage. However, Geetha discovers that Arya had once risked his life for her retrieving her anklet from the sea and realizes Ajay’s love was manipulative, while Arya’s was pure. On the wedding day, she confesses her love to Arya, and they unite. The film ends with Arya symbolically tossing a stone into a Coke cup, marking his emotional victory. The film contrasts Arya’s selfless love with Ajay’s possessiveness. Geetha’s transformation from obligation to true affection forms the heart of the story. Allu Arjun’s performance combines humour, charm, and depth, while Sukumar’s screenplay infuses a classic love triangle with new emotional and narrative energy.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Rao (2023) This essay examines how women are portrayed in Pushpa: The Rise** and makes the case that Telugu and Kannada films frequently uphold toxic masculinity and cast women in submissive roles. Female characters like Srivalli and Pushpa’s mother are shown as dependent on male validation, with their narratives framed through a male gaze. Srivalli is objectified in scenes such as being paid to kiss Pushpa, reinforcing patriarchal values. Older women, like Pushpa’s mother, are depicted as powerless and humiliated. The paper critiques these portrayals and calls for more nuanced, empowering representations of women in Indian cinema.
2. **(View of PUSHPA: UNRAVELLING the PICARESQUE JOURNEY through CINEMATIC NARRATIVES, 2025)** This study interprets *Pushpa: The Rise* as a modern picaresque narrative. It traces Pushpa Raj’s journey from a marginalized labourer to a powerful figure in the smuggling world, highlighting his moral ambiguity and ethical struggles. The episodic structure reflects classical picaresque storytelling, portraying Pushpa as a picaresque—engaged in crime yet fighting systemic injustice. The film’s

realism, use of satire, and first-person narration emphasize the voice of the common man.

3. **TS, R., Tamlaras, P., & JPPW. (2022)** This paper analyzes Gautham Vasudev Menon as a contemporary auteur in Tamil cinema, focusing on his distinct aesthetic, narrative style, and psychological depth. He employs techniques like voiceover narration and dignified male portrayals, often breaking stereotypes around gender roles. His heroines are portrayed with dignity and agency, while his male characters are respectful and emotionally open. These recurring themes and stylistic elements affirm Menon's auteur status and his contribution to more progressive gender representation in Tamil cinema.
4. **Pandey, B., Gaur, M., & Arya, S. (n.d.)** This study analyzes Mani Ratnam's work using auteur theory, focusing on films like *Dil Se*, *Yuva*, *Guru*, and *Raavan*. Ratnam's signature is evident in his use of symbolism, narrative innovation, and technical mastery. Themes like political unrest, personal identity, and social change are explored through rich visuals and motifs such as rain and music. His collaboration with A.R. Rahman and portrayal of strong female characters enhance the emotional and thematic depth of his work. The study confirms Ratnam's auteur status and his significant influence on Indian and global cinema.
5. **Sayed & Sahu (2024)** analyze recurring themes of reincarnation and revenge in *Magadheera*, *Eega*, *Makhi*, and *Baahubali*, revealing how Rajamouli blends traditional storytelling with modern cinematic techniques. *Magadheera* uses visual motifs to explore destiny; *Eega* presents reincarnation with a whimsical twist; and *Baahubali* expands these themes on an epic scale. The study emphasizes Rajamouli's narrative innovation and emotional depth, showing how his films reshape cultural narratives and inspire contemporary Indian cinema.

#### Research Gap:

Even though Sukumar has had a big influence on Telugu film today, he is not fully acknowledged as an auteur in the critical community. While celebrated for commercial success and innovative storytelling, scholarly analysis rarely positions him alongside Indian auteur filmmakers like S. S. Rajamouli or Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Discussions often emphasize box office achievements over his distinct cinematic style, thematic concerns, and directorial signature. Sukumar's work features complex screenplays, morally ambiguous protagonists, and a blend of commercial and artistic elements. Most research on Sukumar appears in journalistic and fan contexts rather than peer-reviewed scholarship. Overall, despite Sukumar's acclaim, the limited scholarly engagement with his oeuvre reveals a significant research gap, presenting an opportunity for future studies to explore his unique contributions to Indian cinema.

#### Theoretical Framework:

The auteur theory, rooted in French film criticism, identifies the director as the film's primary creative force. It highlights how

a director's unique style, ideology, and personal vision shape every aspect of a film. According to this theory, directors are as vital as writers in crafting meaning through their aesthetics, methods, and creativity.

The term was first used in French film criticism of the 1950s and was mainly used by critics such as Truffaut, Bazin, etc. It places the overall creative responsibility for a film's production on the director rather than on the film crew. Sukumar is one such director who is the auteur of his film.

#### Key Premises (Sarris, 1962):

1. Technical Competence — mastery of filmmaking is essential.
2. Distinguishable Personality — consistent style and themes across works.
3. Interior Meaning — director's vision shapes the film's deeper meaning.

#### METHODOLOGY – QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis focuses on understanding human behaviour and cultural contexts through non-numerical data like text, audio, or visuals, emphasizing “how” and “why” questions to uncover deeper meanings. In film analysis, it offers rich insights into cinema's artistic dimensions.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN:

**Qualitative Approach:** This study uses qualitative methodology, content analysis to explore Sukumar's cinematic style, themes, motifs, and narrative techniques.

**Data Collection:** Recurrently watching Sukumar's films, particularly those he co-wrote with Allu Arjun (Arya, Arya 2, Pushpa: The Rise, and Pushpa: The Rule), while taking thorough notes on the story, dialogue, character growth, symbolism, and conflict.

**Thematic Analysis:** Involves immersion, coding (inductive and deductive), theme identification (e.g., identity crises, masculinity), interpretation, model development, and presentation with film examples.

**Content Analysis:** Systematic interpretation of visual, textual, and auditory content using both inductive and deductive coding, analyzing structural elements like plot and character arcs.

**Narrative Analysis:** Focuses on storytelling style (linear, non-linear), exploring how narrative techniques contribute to Sukumar's auteur identity.

**This paper specifically focuses on:** Sukumar-Allu Arjun collaborations by comparing characterizations, analysing their evolving partnership, and assessing how performances enhance Sukumar's characters.

**Theoretical Lens – Auteur Theory:** Grounded in auteur theory, the study identifies recurring themes and stylistic signatures, highlighting Sukumar's technical competence, distinguished personality, and interior meaning.



**Key Thematic Codes:**

- Flawed protagonists and moral ambiguity (e.g., Arya, Pushpa Raj)
- Conflict as the catalyst for development
- Non-traditional, emotionally complex endings
- Symbolism and social commentary blend entertainment with critique

This methodology provides a comprehensive framework to analyse Sukumar's films, emphasizing his auteur status through his work with Allu Arjun.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To evaluate and understand Sukumar as a writer, identify the recurrent themes, artistic components, and narrative techniques that contribute to his distinctive and innovative filmmaking.
2. To explore the relationship between Sukumar and Allu Arjun [the films Arya (1 and 2) and Pushpa (1 and 2)] as well as Allu Arjun's evolving persona.
3. To employ auteur theory to critically analyze Sukumar's corpus of work to recognize the technical competence, distinctive personality, and interior meaning that make him the main creative force behind his movies

**DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:**

**Analyzing Sukumar as a writer and finding some of the recurring themes, stylistic elements, and narrative techniques that contribute to his unique and visionary filmmaking.**

**1. Sukumar's heroes have flaws:**

Sukumar's protagonists often have distinct flaws: Arya 2's hero shows over-possessiveness; Balu in *100% Love* has ego issues; Gautam in 1: *Nenokkadine* suffers from schizophrenia; Chittibabu in *Rangasthalam* is deaf; and Pushpa has a dislocated shoulder.

**2. Sukumar's heroes are anti-heroes or have grey shades:**

Most of Sukumar's protagonists have grey shades. Y. Sunita Chowdary (The Hindu) notes that Sukumar "revels in giving a slight twist" to his heroes, making audiences empathize with their complex behaviour. Sukumar explains that emotions like jealousy, often suppressed, can be driving forces behind actions. An anti-hero lacks traditional heroic traits, but Sukumar justifies their flaws and moral dilemmas effectively. For instance, Arya declares her love to a girl who is already in a relationship in the film Arya.

Justification is provided through dialogues, making Arya's obsessive love relatable rather than stalker-like. Arya's flaws and ultimate sacrifice deepen the audience's connection. In *Arya 2*, the hero's psychopathic traits are balanced by empathy, without explicit flashbacks. Balu in *100% Love* is egoistic. Chitti Babu in *Rangasthalam* is not a typical hero and acts mainly for his brother, showing anti-hero traits. Pushpa is an anti-hero who smuggles red sandalwood.

**3. Sukumar's heroes are intelligent:**

Despite their flaws, Sukumar's heroes are highly intelligent problem-solvers. Pushpa cleverly hides logs; Jr NTR in *Naanaku Prematho* is very smart and overpowers the villain, Balu, in *100% Love*, and also in Arya 2's the Sukumar heroes exemplifies this intelligence.

**4. Simple story with excellent presentation:**

Sukumar's heroes are flawed, disabled, intelligent, and often anti-heroes, portrayed uniquely through epic presentation and emotional depth. He uses simple stories to build strong character setups, employing the screenwriting principle of setup and payoff perfectly. His career divides into pre- and post-*100% Love*, with post-*100% Love* films mostly based on revenge plots. Films like *Naanaku Prematho*, *Rangasthalam*, and *Pushpa* showcase familiar stories made fresh by strong characterizations and screenplay (Chowdary, The Hindu)

**5. Revenge as a central theme:**

Most Sukumar films revolve around revenge, but with new dimensions. 1 *Nenokkadine* adds psychological thriller elements, and *Naanaku Prematho* becomes an intelligent caper thriller through screenplay and presentation. *Rangasthalam's* characterization makes an old story feel new.

**6. Trust and betrayal:**

Betrayal drives Sukumar's revenge narratives, connecting the audience emotionally to the hero. Examples include betrayals in *Rangasthalam*, *Naanaku Prematho*, and 1 *Nenokkadine* (Chowdary, The Hindu).

**7. Nonlinear screenplay:**

Most films use complex, multi-layered nonlinear narratives with repeated scene revisits revealing details, e.g., *Arya 2*, *Rangasthalam*, *Pushpa*, marking him an intelligent screenplay writer.

**8. Unexpected climaxes:**

Sukumar surprises audiences with unpredictable endings, such as *Rangasthalam's* shocking twist and 1 *Nenokkadine's* hidden villain revelation. Also, Sukumar's movies have false and real climaxes. The best example for this is 1: *Nenokkadine* and *Pushpa* series.

**9. Realistic villains:**

Sukumar's simple plots gain strength from relatable, intelligent villains (e.g., *Rangasthalam's* president, *Nannaku Prematho's* Krishnamurthy, *Pushpa's* Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat). Unlike Rajamouli's larger-than-life villains, Sukumar's antagonists are realistic, making hero-villain clashes feel personal and balanced.

**10. Importance of heroines:**

Unlike many commercial films, Sukumar's heroines are crucial to the plot and hero's journey (*Nannaku Prematho*, *100% Love*, 1 *Nenokkadine*, *Arya* series, *Pushpa*). Their roles directly influence story progression and character

decisions.

#### 11. Connecting dots – checkmate:

Sukumar skilfully traps villains with strategic setups and payoffs (e.g., *Naanaku Prematho's* underground pipes, *Rangasthalam's* lip sync scene, 1 *Nenokkadine's* childhood discoveries, *Pushpa's* emotional connection with his family), delivering a satisfying “wow” moment.

#### 12. Unique characters:

His films feature distinct, memorable characters like Anasuya (*Dakshayini*), Sunil (*villain*), Fahadh Faasil (*Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat*), Rashmika (*Srivalli*), Allu Arjun (*Arya, Pushpa*), Samantha, Ram Charan (*Chitti Babu*), and Naga Chaitanya (*100% Love*).

**Emphasis on the Allu Arjun and Sukumar movies (Arya 1 and 2), Pushpa—the rising, and Pushpa—the rule. the evolving personality of Allu Arjun**

#### Characterization of Pushpa Raj – Sukumar’s Writing

The dialogue “Pushpa means fire and not flower” encapsulates the dual nature of Pushpa Raj—externally powerful like fire, internally tender like a flower. In *Pushpa: The Rise*, his fiery persona dominates, while in the sequel, his vulnerability surfaces, notably when he prays for a daughter. Sukumar’s writing builds a deep connection between the audience and Pushpa’s journey, anchored in the interplay of **intention and obstacle**, a storytelling principle used effectively by writers like Aaron Sorkin. Pushpa’s internal motivation is to regain his lost identity and self-respect, while his outward objective is to become the leader of the Red Sandalwood Syndicate. For example, during a police interrogation, his stoic smile only fades when questioned about his identity, highlighting his emotional core. Similarly, when he flaunts his new car at his stepbrother’s house, it signifies both pride and unresolved pain. Sukumar also layers his antagonists—Konda Reddy, Jakka Reddy, and Mangalam Srinu obstruct Pushpa externally, while his stepbrother Mulleti Mohan and DSP Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat challenge him internally. Shekhawat, disrupting both Pushpa’s business and self-worth, emerges as the central antagonist. This multilayered approach elevates Pushpa beyond standard commercial characters. Physically, Pushpa’s characterization stands out through unique mannerisms: **crossed legs**, the **“Thaggede Le” hand gesture**, and a **raised shoulder**. These aren’t superficial stylizations but expressive tools—his raised shoulder originates from childhood trauma, revealing deeper psychological wounds. Psychologically, Pushpa is defined by three traits. 1. **Fearlessness** – Not born from heroism, but childhood humiliation. Even as he projects strength, he retains emotional depth. 2. **Ambition** – He takes bold risks, from smuggling to negotiating deals, driven by a desire for respect and ownership. 3. **Unapologetic Nature** – Despite operating in a grey zone, Pushpa never regrets his actions. He believes in survival, refusing to bow to societal norms, as seen when he quits his job rather than compromise his dignity. Pushpa is not a typical hero but an anti-hero. His motivations are personal, his actions morally ambiguous. He rebels against authority, acts impulsively, and is often self-

destructive. His trauma and underdog past shape his identity. In the climax, when he asserts his identity with blood, it marks the culmination of his psychological journey. Sukumar crafts *Pushpa* as more than a mass entertainer. By blending mass appeal with deep psychological and emotional layers, *Pushpa* becomes a standout in modern Telugu gangster cinema, offering both spectacle and substance.

#### The Jatraa Sequence:

The Jatraa sequence in *Pushpa – The Rule* is a 20-minute highlight and serves as a “movie within a movie” due to its layered writing, performances, and direction. Allu Arjun’s legendary performance has drawn a lot of acclaim, but Rashmika Mandanna’s portrayal of Srivalli is just as important. Srivalli acts as a therapist-like figure, understanding Pushpa’s duality of being both “fire and flower.” The placement of songs like *Gango Renuka Thaali* and *Sooseki* poetically conveys pain and love. From a screenwriting lens, this sequence aligns with Blake Snyder’s “Save the Cat” structure—complete with setup, conflict, and emotional shifts. Pushpa’s sadness over his lack of family name, his protective act toward Kaveri, and the external threats from Bugga Reddy and Mulleti Mohan all build into a compact, emotionally driven arc. Srivalli’s defence of Pushpa during this moment, culminating in her powerful monologue, reinforces the strength of the writing. Sukumar incorporates callbacks and continuity masterfully in this particular episode. For example, the chain that Kaveri offers Pushpa ties back to his emotional trauma from Part 1, eventually getting it at the end of the movie, creating a full-circle moment. Similarly, the dance movements during *Gangamthalli* also mirror those in the final action scene, implying careful visual planning. As Robert McKee emphasizes, character conflict lies in the tension between internal and external emotions. Pushpa’s duality is reflected throughout: he is fierce yet sentimental. The Jatraa is a setup; the climax, a pay-off, forming a structurally and emotionally cohesive narrative arc.



1.1 A Still from Pushpa – The Rule



1.2 A Still from Pushpa – The Rule



1.3 A Still from Pushpa – The Rule

### Srivalli's Characterization:

Srivalli was heavily objectified and largely a love interest in Pushpa: The Rise.

In *Pushpa – The Rule*, she emerges as the soul of the narrative. Her defining monologue, filmed over months, showcases emotional depth as she confronts her oppressive family dynamics and asserts her agency. Rashmika Mandanna also receives whistles and claps for her intense performance. She revealed that Sukumar developed much of the dialogue during filming, reflecting his improvisational style. Her monologue crafted collaboratively reveals Srivalli's pent-up frustration, loyalty to Pushpa, and self-respect. It's both a cathartic moment and a narrative pivot, contributing to the emotional weight of the film. Srivalli's role is central to understanding Pushpa's inner world. Her support during his nightmares, emotional breakdowns, and fatherhood anxieties positions her as his

emotional anchor.

### Visual Craft and Editing:

The vivid color scheme (yellow, blue, and red) and dynamic lighting by cinematographer Miroslaw Kuba Brozek enhance the visual tone of Jatraa. Shot division and rhythm key to maintaining viewer engagement over 20 minutes are noteworthy. Editor Naveen Nooli maintains emotional pacing amid high-energy choreography and action.

Notably, the sequence includes long, uninterrupted takes: Pushpa's desire for a daughter (1m 23s) and Srivalli's monologue (2m 17s) allow emotional breathing room. This balance between pace and pause exemplifies excellent filmmaking.

### Characterization of Arya in Arya and Arya 2:

Sukumar's Arya is a deeply layered protagonist who subverts conventional romantic tropes. In *Arya* (2004), Arya is introduced as a cheerful, impulsive young man who instantly confesses love to Geetha, despite her being with Ajay. His directness and eccentric charm distinguish him from traditional Telugu romantic leads. Though his relentless pursuit borders on obsession, his love is portrayed as selfless, most evident when he helps Geetha and Ajay elope, prioritizing her happiness over his own. Arya's growth from infatuation to mature affection is central to the film.

### Sukumar returns to Arya with more complex psychological undertones in Arya 2.

Now a troubled orphan, Arya is obsessive, erratic, and manipulative yet emotionally vulnerable. Possessiveness and internal strife characterize his friendship with Ajay and his affection for Geetha. Sukumar challenges audience empathy by highlighting Arya's emotional instability, delving into themes like abandonment and insecurity. Arya is no longer the innocent lover but a complex anti-hero shaped by psychological trauma. A unique element of Sukumar's writing is the symbolic use of a golden fish in Arya 2. Arya carries it everywhere—from the office to the village and it plays a key role in both the dream sequence ("Uppenantha") and the climax. This device not only reflects Arya's quirky personality but also serves as a narrative motif, subtly linking key emotional beats.

### Scene Analysis: Ajay's Fake Accident and Arya's Confrontation:

In *Arya 2*, Ajay, threatened by Arya's unpredictable love for Geetha, stages a fake accident to portray Arya as dangerous. Geetha, convinced, slaps Arya and chooses Ajay. Afterward, Ajay confesses to framing Arya. This scene reveals Arya's intense loyalty and emotional depth he sacrifices personal happiness for his friend's love. This scene starkly contrasts Ajay's calculated deceit with Arya's selfless love, exposing the moral ambiguity in their friendship. Arya's silence and sacrifice, despite being wronged, reinforce his core belief: friendship is sacred, not transactional. Even though Arya loves Geetha, he refuses to manipulate or force her love, choosing instead to respect her autonomy. His loyalty to Ajay, despite betrayal, and his willingness to let go of Geetha for her happiness, showcase a self-destructive yet emotionally mature take on love and



friendship. His character reflects a profound idealism, valuing emotional bonds above self-interest.

### Introduction of Arya and Pushpa:

Sukumar uniquely introduces his protagonists *Arya* saves a dog in *Arya*, introduces himself to a fish in *Arya 2*, and Pushpa enters through intense fight sequences in *Pushpa: The Rise* and *Pushpa: The Rule*. surprisingly, Allu Arjun is hanging upside down in both their most recent and early collaborations, signifying narrative continuity.

### Importance of Heroines in Arya and Pushpa's Lives:

Geetha and Srivalli are central to Arya and Pushpa's emotional journeys. In *Arya 2*, Geetha witnesses Arya's vulnerability and his loyalty, standing by during major narrative turns. Srivalli plays a crucial role in *Pushpa: The Rule* but is less noticeable in *Pushpa: The Rise*. Srivalli has become more visible, influencing Pushpa's choices and taking on enemies, such as her brother-in-law, in a powerful monologue.

### Growth of Sukumar and Allu Arjun:

From the fashionable hero in *Arya* to the unpolished, unglamorized Pushpa Raj, Sukumar completely changed the perception of Allu Arjun. He was the first filmmaker to remove the star's glitz while still making him a "Icon Star." At the 69th National Awards, Allu Arjun took home the Best Actor trophy for his role in *Pushpa: The Rise*.

Sukumar's oeuvre through the lens of auteur theory, identifying the technical competence, distinguishable Personality, and interior meaning that establish him as the primary creative force behind his films.

### AUTEUR THEORY

This study shows that **Sukumar** is the Auteur of his films, as they are marked by flawed protagonists, psychological depth, and character-driven storytelling. Sukumar's recurring themes—like identity crisis, emotional vulnerability, and the need for validation—unify his filmography.

### Sukumar–Allu Arjun–DSP Synergy

In all their collaborations, **Devi Sri Prasad (DSP)**'s music has amplified the narrative impact, be it item numbers like *Ringa Ringa* and *Oo Antava*, or emotional ballads like Srivalli and Feel My Love. Item songs are a common theme that enhances character mood and appeal to a broad audience.

### TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

#### What Differentiates Sukumar's Heroes?

Insecurity, egoism, and a strong need for approval or affection are all present in Sukumar's protagonists, who frequently use humor or arrogance to cover up their suffering. For instance, Arya appears cheerful but is deeply lonely. His manipulative behaviour and stalking stem from emotional trauma, ultimately culminating in a selfless act of letting go. Arya is shown in *Arya 2* as a darker, compulsive person who is influenced by control issues and abandonment. His intense love is flawed but emotionally resonant. Sukumar infuses deep emotion into his films. In *Rangasthalam*, Chitti Babu's hearing disability

symbolizes his insecurity, which he finally overcomes after his brother's death. His rawness and emotional journey maintain Sukumar's hallmark vulnerability.

Pushpa is Sukumar's most layered character yet. His twin struggles **identity crisis** and **self-respect** drive him from a labourer to a syndicate leader. His emotional breakdowns, particularly around his inability to give a family name to his child, reflect deep pain. Srivalli's support and his brother's acceptance bring emotional closure, completing his arc.

Sukumar redefines heroism by portraying **grey-shaded, emotionally complex characters**. His heroes, though flawed, possess intelligence, courage, and immense love. Sukumar challenges the idealized "hero" archetype and holds a mirror to the audience. This is why his characters resonate they are raw, real, and deeply relatable.

### DISTINGUISHABLE PERSONALITY

#### 1. Flawed Protagonists & Social Misfits

Sukumar crafts protagonists with psychological, emotional, or physical flaws often anti-heroes with grey shades and high intelligence. Their ideologies conflict with societal norms, creating organic drama and emotional investment. In *Pushpa*, the titular character strives for upward mobility despite society's constant efforts to demean him, leading viewers to root for him. In *Arya*, the hero disrupts a relationship, challenging social expectations, yet wins audience support. This technique heightens immersion through conflict-driven storytelling.

#### 2. Climax Through Conversation, Not Combat

Sukumar often replaces climactic action with ideological confrontations. His climaxes—seen in *Pushpa, 1: Nenokkadine*, *Rangasthalam*, and *Nannaku Prematho* unfold through dialogue, offering psychological insight rather than spectacle. In *Pushpa*, the hero and villain converse over drinks, symbolizing a shift from violence to intellect. Similarly, *Rangasthalam*'s climax explores caste and justice through Chittibabu and Dakshinamurthy's conversation. These exchanges reveal character motives and resolve arcs effectively.

#### 3. Use of False Climaxes

Sukumar frequently employs false climaxes to subvert expectations and deepen narrative closure. In *Pushpa: The Rise*, the syndicate takeover feels like the climax, but the true resolution comes in his final confrontation with Bhanwar Singh. *Rangasthalam* misleads viewers into thinking the village president's death is the peak, only to later reveal the real killer. *Nannaku Prematho* similarly resolves with an emotional father-son moment, not just revenge. 1: *Nenokkadine* has multiple conclusions, each gradually revealing truth and closure. These layered endings enhance cinematic experience and narrative satisfaction. Even *Pushpa 2* highlights emotional resolution, such as the reuniting of the family following the intense action scene, demonstrating Sukumar's narrative originality.

#### 4. Blending Art with Commerce

Sukumar's films feature emotionally complex characters and innovative screenplays, yet remain accessible through music, action, and emotional depth. Characters often display traits like jealousy and selfishness, adding psychological realism. Non-linear storytelling, as in *Arya* and *Pushpa*, keeps audiences actively engaged. His commercial success—being among the top-grossing Indian directors—proves his ability to appeal to mass audiences while maintaining creative integrity (*Pushpa: The Rise* became the highest-grossing Indian film of 2021).

#### 5. Multi-Layered Narratives

Sukumar's screenplays are defined by narrative layering, where psychological complexity, non-linear timelines, and social themes coexist. His protagonists are morally ambiguous, allowing for nuanced audience interpretation. Revisited scenes gradually uncover truths, enhancing viewer engagement. A recurring theme is identity—Pushpa explores personal branding; Rangasthala explores caste identity and power. These themes are embedded through subtle visual cues and dialogue. Despite their intellectual complexity, emotional arcs ground the stories. Films like *Pushpa 2: The Rule* balance mass **entertainment with layered storytelling, proving Sukumar's mastery in weaving emotion, intellect, and spectacle.**

#### Interior Meaning

Sukumar's early films were deeply personal, drawing inspiration from his life. For instance, *100% Love* features a Maths genius, reflecting Sukumar's background as a lecturer in Maths and Physics at Aditya Junior College for seven years. After *1: Nenokkadine* (2014), there was a noticeable emotional shift in his storytelling, especially after the passing of his father. Nannaku Prematho was dedicated to his father, and coincidentally, composer DSP lost his father around the same time, adding emotional weight to the film. The story's core—an intelligent son seeking revenge for his father's betrayal—mirrored Sukumar's sense of loss, especially in hospital scenes that highlighted deep emotional vulnerability. While filmmaking is collaborative, the director's vision often defines the final product. Sukumar, as both writer and director, plays a central role in shaping his films' aesthetic, emotional, and ideological tones.

#### CONCLUSION

This study examined Sukumar's writing style, auteur characteristics, and collaborations with Allu Arjun. He integrates personal experiences with commercial cinema, merging psychological depth with mass appeal. His protagonists—Pushpa Raj, Gautham, Arya, and Chitti Babu—are complex, often morally grey, and psychologically nuanced. His stories strike a balance between emotional resonance and structural complexity, elevating mainstream Telugu films to intellectually engaging cinema. From *Arya* (2004) to *Pushpa: The Rule* (2024), his growth with Allu Arjun reveals an attempt to transform the star's image into a character with emotional depth.

Their collaboration reflects Sukumar's auteurism, control, and commitment to pushing narrative and performance boundaries. Sukumar satisfies the three requirements of technical proficiency, distinguished personality, and interior meaning in accordance with Truffaut and Sarris' auteur theory. His meticulous involvement in writing, improvisation, and collaboration with DSP exemplifies his holistic approach. Ultimately, Sukumar's cinema serves as a discursive space for emotional, social, and psychological exploration, solidifying his position as a true auteur.

#### Limitations of the Study

1. **Qualitative Focus:** Relies on thematic analysis; lacks audience reception and box office data.
2. **Limited Scope:** Focused mainly on Sukumar-Allu Arjun collaborations.
3. **Subjectivity:** Interpretations may vary across scholars.
4. **Lack of Quantitative Data:** Does not include survey or statistical metrics.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

1. Analyse Sukumar's complete filmography.
2. Conduct comparative studies with other Auteurs.
3. Include audience reception and box-office data.

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